NATIONAL PROVERBS

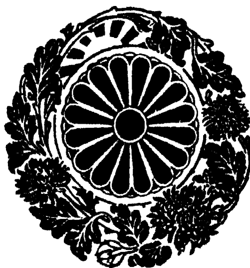
JAPAN

*Uniform with this Volume*

| | |
|---|---|
| ENGLAND | |
| IRELAND | |
| SCOTLAND | |
| RUSSIA | |
| CHINA | |
| HOLLAND | |
| DENMARK | |
| ARABIA | |
| TURKEY | |
| FRANCE (in Two Languages) | |
| SPAIN | do. |
| GERMANY | do. |
| ITALY | do. |

***Others in Preparation.***

# NATIONAL PROVERBS: JAPAN



London:
Frank Palmer, Red Lion Court.

*First Published*, 1913.

*THE Proverbs of a Nation are not only an epitome of its wisdom, but crystallise for us much of its national temperament and popular habits of thought. Nowhere, perhaps, can what are regarded as the national traits be so compactly presented as in these saws and proverbs. In the preparation of the present series the utmost care has been taken to unearth those sayings which are in danger of falling into disuse, and are not widely known. The commonplace Proverbs have, in most cases, been rejected; little-known sources have been investigated, and everything possible done to give, in each case, the cream of the available material. The Editors will be very grateful to hear of any good but little-known Proverbs which readers may be able to add to the present collections.*

CRAFTY eyes and loose lips were never modelled on the face of virtue.

Virtue carries a lean purse.

If a post is smeared with the mud of the river-bed, it's little use its head aspiring to the heavens.

# *National Proverbs*

He who hunts two hares, leaves one and loses the other.

The echo answers the voice.

The mile is long to him who is tired.

If there are two fires in one room, both will smoke.

The second word makes the fray.

## *Japan*

Though you lock the door ever so securely trouble will find a way in.

Even in a village of eight there's generally a patriot to be found.

In the house where the samisen is played all day long there will be little rice in the larder.

It's no use cutting a stick when the fight is over.

# *National Proverbs*

A bad daughter-in-law is worse than a thousand devils.

When the wild geese fly South and the first reed dies put on another garment.

All colours are the same to a blind man.

The love-lorn maiden under the plum tree forgets that the kettle is simmering on the hibachi.

## *Japan*

The way of the slothful is a hedge of thorns.

When all men praised the peacock for his beautiful tail, the birds cried out with one consent "Look at his legs! and what a voice!"

It is difficult to be strong and not be rash.

If every day was a sunny day who would not wish for rain.

When the first reed dies one knows that Autumn's at the door.

It's generally the wickedest man who knows the nearest path to the shrine.

Valiancy and boastfulness never buckle on the same sword.

Avoid three things—a snake, a smooth-tongued man, and a wanton woman.

## *Japan*

If a man steals gold he's put in prison; if he steals a land he's made king.

A perfect vase never came from a bad potter's wheel.

Make your plans for the year at the beginning; correct your wife from the first day.

Never follow on the heels of a sorrow or it may turn back.

# *National Proverbs*

A lie has no legs, but scandalous wings.

Doing nothing is doing ill.

Game is cheaper in the market, but sweeter in the field.

A bow long bent waxeth weak.

Daylight will peep through a very small hole.

## *Japan*

Never trust a woman even if she has borne you seven children.

The stone may hurt the dog but not as much as the hand that threw it.

The acolyte at the gate reads scriptures he has never learnt.

Love does not recognise the difference between peasant and mikado.

There is more delight in hope than in enjoyment.

He who makes the edge of a sword visible, must destroy its keenness.

The laden almond tree by the wayside is sure to be bitter.

Going downhill no one is old.

He who is in haste fishes in an empty pool.

# *Japan*

One meal without rice mars domestic happiness for a week.

Physic for healing, soup for nourishment, and sakè for happy living.

The man who makes the first bad move always loses the game.

Better mend old garments as a poor man's wife than put on rich ones as a geisha.

Even the lords of hell bow the knee to the fat purse.

Everything must wait its turn—peach-blossoms for the second month and chrysanthemums for the ninth.

A cold hibachi has no glow, nor a hungry man wit.

Skilful workmen need not travel afar to earn their bread.

## *Japan*

A knowledge of the sacred books is the beginning of sorrow.

The sparrow flying in the rear of the hawk thinks the hawk is fleeing.

The little snake studies the ways of the big serpent.

One dog yelping at nothing will set ten thousand straining at their collars.

If a few sen do not go, many sen will not come.

At ten years a wonder-child ; at fifteen a talented youth ; at twenty a common man.

Happiness rarely keeps company with an empty stomach.

Getting money is like digging with a needle ; spending it like water soaking into sand.

## *Japan*

Even the street-dog knows the house of a poor man.

Those discontented with their fate will accuse even the sun of partiality.

To forgive the unrepentant is like making pictures on water.

When a poor man visits his relations they do not hurry to kiss his feet.

Better go without medicine than call in a clumsy physician.

Don't look on the gold pieces you won ; rather consider those you might have lost.

Whoever can see three days ahead will be rich three thousand years.

Following Happiness is like chasing the wind, or clutching the shadow.

## *Japan*

Even Fuji is without beauty to one who is hungry and cold.

Brothers quarrel like thieves inside a house, but outside their swords leap out in each other's defence.

A man with a sour face should not open a shop.

Make sure of a thrifty wife, even if you have to wear your shoes out looking for her.

One doesn't take a butcher's knife to carve the rib of a fowl.

What's an inch in the eye of a man is a foot in the eye of his master.

It is foolish to fight the wall after the thieves are gone.

The character of a man depends on whether he has good or bad friends.

## *Japan*

If two men quarrel, even their dogs will have a difference.

If a workman sleeps away goes his job; if a tiger sleeps off goes its hide.

Even the Mikado's household knows when salt and rice are dear.

The life of man is like a long journey with a heavy load on the back.

It is foolish to try and graft a bamboo shoot on a cherry tree.

If the hen crows instead of the cock there won't be peace in the fowlyard.

Better go without rice for a little than be in debt for long.

Those who travel on horseback know nothing of the toil of those who travel on foot.

# *Japan*

If you pray to a Buddha, pray to one only.

The path of duty lies in what is near at hand ; and men seek for it in what is remote.

The eyes of a hireling are attracted by money, as a fly's by blood.

The man who has once been bitten by a snake fears every piece of rope.

Deceive, but don't insult, the rich and powerful.

Who is bred on a river dies in the river.

A mended lid to a cracked pot.

The heaviest rains fall on the leaky house.

A wise man in a fool's service is a clear pearl thrown into lacquer.

# *Japan*

Among flowers the cherry-blossom, among men the Samurai.

A man's good name is as precious to him as its skin is to a tiger.

A cheap purchase is money lost.

Where there isn't any water one can't sail ships.

The wind and the cherry-blossom can never be good friends.

Who can speak well can also lie well.

If a man is poor and humble even his own wife and children will despise him ; if he is rich and powerful even the folk of far-off countries will heap praises on him.

Good physic always tastes bitter.

One doesn't expect to find grass growing in a market-place.

# *Japan*

A long life or a happy life lies in the lap of the gods.

To overcome evil is worth three pieces of gold; to have none in the heart is worth five.

It's easier to rule a kingdom than regulate a family.

Let a man so act by day that he may lie happily on his mat by night.

Wise people do not contend against the tongues of fools.

A man who always wears his best kimono has no Sunday clothes.

Unpolished pearls never shine.

A sorrow is an itching place that is made worse by scratching.

The spell of gold can put wit into a fool's mouth.

# *Japan*

If a man is hungry anything tastes good.

When the oil is exhausted the lamp dies out.

Every man carries a parasite somewhere.

There's no tree that bears gold fruit.

He who wants little seldom goes wrong.

He who falls in love has come to the end of happiness.

The butterfly, tempted by the flower, gets lured into the spider's web.

The best crops are always on the fields of others.

The reputation of a thousand years may be determined by the conduct of one hour.

# *Japan*

Though tears fall they do not help to pay the debt.

It is better to be the beak of a hen than the tail of an ox.

Not to know is to be a Buddha.

Excessive tenderness is followed by a hundredfold dislike.

Even with washing charcoal does not become white.

Quarrelsome people always live roof to roof.

Two swords cannot be contained in one scabbard.

To the ant a few drops of rain is a flood.

Spilt water cannot be gathered up again.

Better the dumplings than the apple blossom.

# *Japan*

In the hum of the market there is money, but under the cherry tree there is rest.

When a rat crosses the street everyone cries : " Hit him."

At cleaning-time everyone should yield to the woman with the broom.

He who sits in, and he who pulls the rickshaw are alike men.

# *National Proverbs*

Under a powerful general there are no feeble soldiers.

There's no ease for the whole mouth when one tooth is aching.

Better breeding than birth.

When drinking sakè remember the poverty of your family.

If one man praises you a thousand will repeat the praise.

## *Japan*

A road of a thousand miles begins with one step.

The fallen blossom does not return to the branch.

Kindness is more binding than a loan.

A fog cannot be dispelled by a fan.

There's no medicine for lovesickness and a fool.

Give a costly sword to the warrior; paint and powder to the beautiful woman.

When puss mourns for the mouse do not take her seriously.

There's no door for the buying that will shut out the world of men.

Even the Emperor has straw-sandalled relations.

## *Japan*

Fall seven times, stand up the eighth time.

In the widow's house there is no fat mouse.

Many captains, and the ship goes to the rocks.

Pinch yourself and know how others feel.

Too much courtesy becomes discourtesy.

# *National Proverbs*

The bravest of men may be harassed by the want of one sen.

Destroy all passions when you light Buddha's lamp.

Even the heart has its boundaries.

The bosoms of the wise are the tombs of secrets.

The tongue of woman is her sword, which never rusts.

## *Japan*

A satiated mouth soon forgets the benefactor.

Think about the misfortunes of others, that you may be satisfied with your own lot.

A good rat will not eat the grain near its own hole.

Cold tea and cold rice are bearable; but cold looks and cold words are unendurable.

The heron's a saint when there are no fish about.

The bird that offers itself to the net is fair game to the fowler.

A lean dog shames his master.

Learning without wisdom is a load of books on an ass's back.

A young wife should be but a shadow and an echo in her house.

## *Japan*

Cast no dirt into the well that gives you water.

Where profit is, loss is hidden near by.

Even the street-dog has his lucky days.

Even in hell one finds companionship.

A woman's thoughts are afterthoughts.

While there's fire in one's cooking-stove guests will never cease to arrive.

If a man be great even his dog will wear a proud look.

If you wish to learn the highest truth you must begin with the alphabet.

The biggest of serpents has no terrors for the eagle.

## *Japan*

Even the hawk and the street-dog have their friends.

One written word is worth a thousand pieces of gold.

Any soil will do to bury in.

One good word can warm three winter months.

In plenty think of want; in want do not presume on plenty.

A good drum does not require hard striking.

Winnow while the wind is blowing.

The cleverest of lies only lasts a week.

Lend money to a city, but never to a man.

It's the little wheels of a waggon that go first.

## *Japan*

Those whose care extends not far ahead will find their troubles near at hand.

You can't put two sho of sakè into a one-sho bottle.

Buy land that slopes toward the centre and marry a girl whose mother is good.

Two things never pall—a moonlight night and well-cooked rice.

## *National Proverbs*

When the great serpent travels crane-flies keep out of its track.

If you must be a dog it's best to be the dog of a samurai.

A beaten soldier fears a reed.

A man learns little from victory —much from defeat.

Look the other way when the girl at the tea-house smiles.

# *Japan*

The eye is harder to please than the stomach.

A thing tied too tight often unties itself.

Where there are fish there must be water.

The barber never curls his own hair.

A handful of rice is wealth to a starving man.

From poverty to profusion is a hard journey, but the way back is easy.

When you're thirsty it's too late to think about digging a well.

One can stand still in a flowing stream, but not in the world of men.

Success is the foundation-stone on which happiness is built.

## *Japan*

Put a small fish on the hook to catch a large one.

To the eye of a crow its young one has milk-white feathers.

Talk will never cook rice.

The rich man's fowls never know the want of grain.

When the wild geese fly they have the sense to follow their leader.

# *National Proverbs*

There are gods in everything—even in hell.

When families quarrel outsiders deride.

It's the poor who give alms to the poor.

What is quickly learnt is soon forgotten.

Only for love one goes to Kanda and back.

## *Japan*

When man takes fire into his bosom he provokes his own calamity.

He who never suffers persecution will never become a Buddha.

A woman's tongue is only three inches long, but it can kill a man six feet high.

The pebble in the brook secretly thinks itself a precious stone.

It's no use giving gold coins to a cat.

A man's teeth often bite his own tongue.

One cannot learn to swim in a field.

No standing in the world without stooping.

When you're in need of help don't ask the devil for aid.

# *Japan*

The fiercest serpent may be overcome by a swarm of ants.

A bridled tongue is a guarantee of a care-free heart.

Applause is the beginning of abuse.

Its the tortoise that discounts the value of a pair of fast legs.

One good deed is better than three days of fasting at a shrine.

When fortune comes to a house the devil accompanies it to the door.

A determined will will drive through a granite rock.

Be civil to a mother-in-law and she will come to your house three times a day.

You can't expect blossom from a dead cherry tree.

# *Japan*

Hate a priest and you will hate his very hood.

When folly passes by, reason draws back.

There's always a bee to sting a weeping face.

Amateur tactics cause grave wounds.

Where there's a beginning there's an end.

Never ask your guest whether you shall kill your chicken.

When the wild geese start the mud-flies also prepare for flight.

A borrowed cat catches no mice.

Even a dead cherry tree can bring picturesqueness to a barren hill.

Laughter cannot bring back what anger has driven away.

# *Japan*

Even if you put a snake in a bamboo tube you cannot change its wriggling disposition.

Better to wash an old kimono than borrow a new one.

The drunkard knows not the shame of wine—nor the abstinent its glow.

Keep a sharp edge on your sword and your honour.

No purse so fat as to buy back a lost appetite.

Whoever touches a stricken snake feels its fangs.

One can see the heavens through a needle's eye.

A man's heart and the autumn sky are alike fickle.

Every highroad leads to the Mikado's palace.

# *Japan*

A man's own breast is the best wallet to carry his troubles in.

Better do one act quickly than talk about a hundred for a day.

All married women are not wives.

Like ginger and cinnamon men become more pungent with age.

Even a mountain can be worn away by the tread of many feet.

# *National Proverbs*

There's no tree in the forest that bears cooked rice.

If you have to kill a snake, kill it once and for all.

Lepers are always envious of those with sores.

A friend at hand is better than relatives at a distance.

It only takes a little twig to poke out the eye.

Even the mightiest wind can stir up no waves in the underground well.

The hole the crab digs takes on the shape of its shell.

The only child who really resembles his parent is a son of the devil.

Even the frog's croak in the well is music to its mate.

Women and workmen are difficult things to handle.

Metal is tested by fire; men by wine.

One word of thanks reaches up to Heaven.

When you aim at the rat beware of the vase.

Any place is good enough to bury a dead rat in.

# *Japan*

Who travels for love finds a thousand miles only one mile.

Better to be proficient in one art than an amateur in a hundred.

What one does, one becomes.

Even the clumsy swordsmith sometimes makes a good sword.

He who can use his tongue can find out any road.

At the first cup man drinks wine, at the second wine drinks wine, at the third wine drinks man.

It's the biggest cherry-tree that attracts the wind.

He who gives away coals when it is snowing is a noble man—or a fool.

The great man is he who does not lose his child's love.

# *Japan*

The bird flying in the air does not fear the water.

It's the physician that breaks the rules of health.

One can't lap up the ocean with a shell.

To the rat a thief is the same as a samurai.

When there isn't any needle, thread is not of much use.

Even the peach grown in the shade will ripen in the end.

The umbrella-maker's apprentice will turn the world upside down in trying to mend one umbrella.

What has been the fashion once will come into fashion again.

Even the young crow has the grace to return part of its food to its parent.

After a victory we should bind the helm-band tighter.

To hear a hundred times is not so good as to see once.

Ten men, ten minds.

A pig used to dirt turns up its nose at rice boiled in milk.

A truthful wanton is as great a miracle as a square egg.

The string of a man's sack of patience is generally tied with a slip-knot.

Don't condemn till you've heard both sides of the case.

One cannot tell what passes through the heart of a man by the look on his face.

Troubles follow the restless like flies in the fifth month.

# *Japan*

At the foot of a lighthouse one finds darkness.

A small-minded man looks at the sky through a reed.

Be a serpent save in the poison.

It's always the lazybones who wants to work on a holiday.

When the sweat has dried the labour's forgotten.

Even the wildest horses have to take the bit at last.

The empire or the ash-box will grow dirtier the more that's poured into them—gold or ashes.

Don't prophesy to the man who can see farther than you can.

Even if your mouth is parched don't drink water from a robber's well.

# *Japan*

The frog who has never seen the sea thinks the well a fine stretch of water.

A poor man is short of wit, a lean horse long of hair.

There are some gods who abandon men ; they are those gods who know men.

There's always a floating piece of wood to help a blind tortoise.

A man knows how to spend a million yen in marrying off his daughter, but does not know how to spend a hundred thousand in bringing up his child.

When you buy a vase cheap look for the flaw, and when a man offers favours search for his purpose.

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**Frank Palmer :: :: Red Lion Court, London**

# *National Proverbs*

Ferrestone Press, Ltd., West Norwood, S.E. and Red Lion Court, E.C.